



**United Way of Northwest Louisiana**

August 24, 1998

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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION  
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

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The Honorable William Kennard  
Chairman, Federal Communications Commission  
1919 M Street NW  
Washington, DC 20554

CC Docket No. 98-121

Dear Chairman Kennard:

I wrote you on January 8 of this year about BellSouth's application with the Federal Communications Commission to enter the long-distance market in Louisiana. I am writing you again on behalf of the non-profit community organizations that serve thousands of clients in northwest Louisiana, many of whom live in some of the most rural areas of the state. I recommend approval of BellSouth's second request.

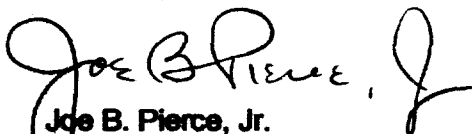
The conditions are still the same in our rural areas, no other providers besides BellSouth offer local phone service. There is a great deal of competitive activity in the MSA of Shreveport-Bossier. Here, large customers have more choices than ever before for their local service provider. But this only extends to the residential customer on a minimal basis, and again, outside the MSA there is no competition.

True competition only occurs when there are competitors for the business. This may sound obvious (or even a truism!), but I continue to believe that the benefits of true competition for bundled local and long-distance services will not flow to thousands of our citizens until the existing long distance carriers start offering local service. The fastest way to make that happen is to approve BellSouth's entry into the long distance business. In other words, you must prime the pump for competition by forcing full competition in the MSAs so competitors must expand their territories to rural areas to remain competitive.

Furthermore, I do not understand how if the elected members of the Louisiana Public Service Commission continue to recommend approval that the FCC, located in Washington, D.C., ignore their recommendation. It seems that non-profit agencies in my area, along with hundreds of dedicated volunteers and the thousands of social service recipients are being denied the benefits of competition and economic activity that true competition could bring.

I urge you to follow their recommendation this time, and approve the BellSouth request. It is just as important today to help meet the social and community needs in northwest Louisiana as it was in January.

Very truly yours,

  
Joe B. Pierce, Jr.  
Executive Director

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4215 Linwood Avenue • Shreveport, Louisiana 71108  
318.869.2352 • Fax: 318.865.0495

*The United Way Mission: To increase the organized capacity of people to care for one another.*